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before the

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE
AND AGENCY ORGANIZATION
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

on

**MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF HIGH GAS PRICES ON
FEDERAL EMPLOYEES AND OTHER WORKERS**

NOVEMBER 16, 2005

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today on behalf of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to talk about the issue of mitigating the impact of high gas prices on Federal employees. President Bush demonstrated his commitment that all Federal agencies should maximize their conservation of gasoline and diesel fuel by directing agencies to conserve natural gas, electricity, gasoline and diesel fuel to the maximum extent consistent with the effective discharge of public responsibilities. I will focus on the work that OPM has accomplished in helping Federal agencies understand and implement the human capital flexibilities available to them to comply with the President's directive.

On September 2, 2005, in the wake of the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina and the soaring fuel prices that followed, Director Springer issued a Memorandum to Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies highlighting these human capital flexibilities. This memo focused primarily on telework for its potential to reduce the need for employees to commute. It urged agencies to continue to "increase the use of telework, carpooling, and public transportation by employees" and provided further information about telework resources and support, including an announcement that GSA-sponsored telework centers would be free to new Federal users through the end of the year. In addition, we mentioned other options such as vanpooling, shuttle services, public transportation, and transit subsidy programs, as well as using technical solutions such as conference calls, videoconferencing, and email exchanges. Taken all together, these measures, applied by agencies according to their own missions and workforces, could substantially reduce the impact of the fuel costs on employees, and reduce overall fuel consumption.

Another workplace flexibility - Alternative Work Schedule programs (AWS)—*i.e.* flexible work schedules and compressed work schedules—have the potential to assist employees in reducing fuel consumption because employees are able to fulfill their biweekly work requirements in fewer than 10 workdays, which results in fewer days employees must commute to and from work. OPM provides AWS guidance to agencies through our website and direct consultation.

Several agency telework coordinators reported to us that Director Springer's September 2 memo was a valuable tool in helping them promote telework in their own organizations, as the fuel prices proved an increasing hardship for employees. Since this memo, the GSA-sponsored telework centers report that there have been 53 new users who have worked an average of 2 days per week. Also, during this time, there has been an increase in time spent by current telework center users. Twenty-six users have increased their usage to more than 2 days per week.

On September 21, 2005, a Government-wide agency telework coordinator meeting focused on telework as a human capital flexibility in broader emergency response situations. A panel comprising representatives of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the General Services Administration (GSA), OPM, and the GSA-sponsored telework centers discussed telecommuting in the context of Continuity of Operations Planning ("COOP") with an audience of over sixty Federal agency telework coordinators. During the event, the September 2 memo was provided to all participants, and the OPM representative on the panel mentioned its message and encouraged agencies to utilize it to leverage telework within their respective agencies.

Our partner in promoting telework, GSA, runs a telework listserv, with OPM support. This listserv is used to communicate information, guidance, news, and events regarding telework to over 1,000 subscribers throughout the Federal Government. The offer of no cost to new users until the end of the year from the GSA-sponsored telework centers mentioned in the September 2 memo was promoted through this listserv, most recently on November 7 with the heading "Feeling Foul about Fuel Prices? Try a Telework Center!"

These activities specifically addressing the high gas prices rest on a foundation of intensive work on the part of OPM to support the telework program Government-wide. The September 21 event was part of a regular quarterly series of meetings co-sponsored by OPM and GSA. These meetings bring agency telework coordinators together to work collaboratively with OPM and GSA, to network and share program ideas and concerns, raise unique agency issues, and give OPM and GSA the opportunity to educate agency representatives on new initiatives.

Staff from OPM also provide agencies with individualized guidance and technical support through on-site visits. Through these visits to agencies, OPM consults with them to enhance and further develop their telework program by identifying problem areas, addressing concerns and challenges unique to them, providing policy guidance, and exploring specific and tailored solutions to the agency's issues. It is at these face-to-face encounters with agency representatives that OPM provides individualized technical

support, including encouraging the use of telework as a tool to meet agency human capital goals. In 2005 alone, OPM has conducted on-site visits with 13 agencies to date.

Finally, as befits a program that promotes remote work, OPM has a variety of electronic approaches to promoting and supporting telework. These include a website, www.telework.gov, co-managed by OPM and GSA; e-learning modules available to Federal employees and managers on www.USALearning.gov; “webinars” for managers, and the aforementioned telework listserv.

That concludes my remarks. I would be pleased to respond to any questions the Subcommittee may have.